

LESSON 1

INSTRUCTION

TRANSPOSITION

Gregorian melodies are written in moveable *do* notation, without alteration in the key signature and with only one accidental, the *teb*. This notation reflects the original situation of Gregorian chant. Indeed, for many centuries these pieces were interpreted according to a merely oral, not written, tradition: the cantor would begin the piece on a comfortable pitch, and all simply followed. Moreover, there was little or no need for a fixed *do* system of notation when the music was strictly vocal, not requiring the accompaniment of any musical instrument. Today, however, the schola director or member may often have the occasion to sing Gregorian pieces at some fixed pitch. Melodies in the seventh mode with dominant on *re* will most often not be sung on D, but will have to be lowered one or two tones, perhaps even more, especially if they are followed by the recitation of a psalm. Inversely, melodies in the second mode with dominant on *fa* would be too low if sung on F, and so would need to be raised. The schola director may have to transpose a piece before intoning it, or he may have to prepare it in advance, deciphering it with the help of a musical instrument. Either way, he is forced to bridge the gap between Gregorian moveable *do* notation and fixed *do* notation. Lessons 1 and 2 take the reader through the steps of this procedure, which we will here call *transposing a piece*. Transposition, in these two lessons, involves taking a melody in moveable *do* notation and expressing it in absolute pitch, in other words, in a given key. Afterward, some general advice will be given with regard to choosing ideal keys for Gregorian pieces.

Gregorian chant is a modal kind of music. In Lesson 13 of the previous volume on modality, we saw that the modes divide up according to the four possible final notes:

re, mi, fa, and *sol*. These final notes engender characteristic intervals within the fifth and the (higher or lower) fourth, which, added together make up the octave that covers the whole range, or at least the main part of the range of the melody. What we call transposing a piece here consists of *changing the pitch while respecting exactly that modal structure*, that is, the value of all the intervals of the melody. The characteristic fifth and fourth of the mode, though raised or lowered on the scale of pitches by transposition, will be maintained intrinsically identical by means of sharps or flats added to the notes in the scale. Let us take an example in each of the modes.

TRANSPPOSITION
IN PROTUS
—FINAL *RE*

Here is a melody in second mode: the antiphon *Juste et pie vivamus*, the fifth antiphon of Vespers for the Third Sunday of Advent (Roman version):

Ant.
2

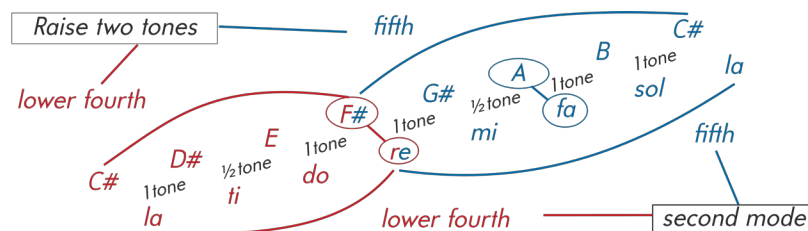
U- ste et pi- e vi- vá-mus, * ex- spectán-tes be- á- tam spem
et advén-tum Dó- mi- ni.

Let us live justly and piously, while awaiting the blessed hope and the coming of the Lord.

Its final is *re*, and its dominant is *fa*. Let us suppose we choose to sing it on a dominant A. *Fa* = F in absolute pitch. Now, F–A is an interval of a third consisting of two full tones (F–G: one whole tone, G–A: one whole tone); so everything must be raised by two whole tones.

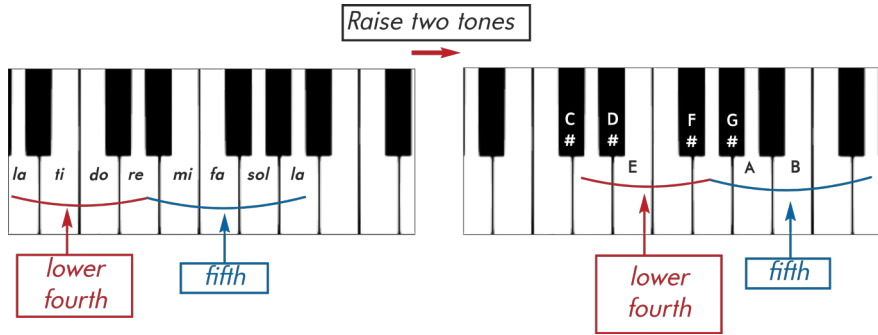
The final *re* must likewise be raised by a third consisting of two full tones. The transposed final will thus be F# (D–E: one whole tone, E–F#: one whole tone).

Remark. Let us recall that the sharp raises the natural notes one semitone. It modifies thus the pitch of the note it affects; it becomes higher by one semitone.



The number of sharps (four sharps: F#, C#, G#, D#) is the same as in the key of E Major (C Major raised by two tones gives E Major), except that the “tonic” or final note here is F#.

Let us see how this transposition works out on the keyboard of a piano:



The intonation of the antiphon above becomes:

F# F# E F# G# A B A G F# F#

To facilitate reading the transposition, the table below allows us to grasp how, by the use of the seven following clefs, it is possible to read any note of the scale in any situation. We have at our disposition:

Four positions for G clefs:

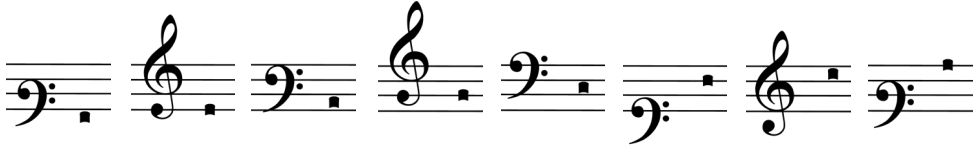
The image shows four treble clefs on staves, each with a different G-clef position: soprano (first line), alto (second line), tenor (third line), and bass (fourth line).

Four positions for F clefs:

The image shows four bass clefs on staves, each with a different F-clef position: soprano (first space), alto (second space), tenor (third space), and bass (fourth space).

Be sure to note that a clef must always be situated **on a line** and never between lines.

The note *do* thus can be read in every position on the staff in the following manner:



Our antiphon, once transposed so that it begins on an F#, can be read in a superimposed F (bass) clef on the second line:

Ant.
2

U- ste et pi- e vi- vá-mus,*

TRANSPPOSITION
IN DEUTERUS
—FINAL *MI*

Here now is a melody in the third mode, the antiphon *Magna opera Domini*, the second antiphon of Sunday Vespers (Roman tone):

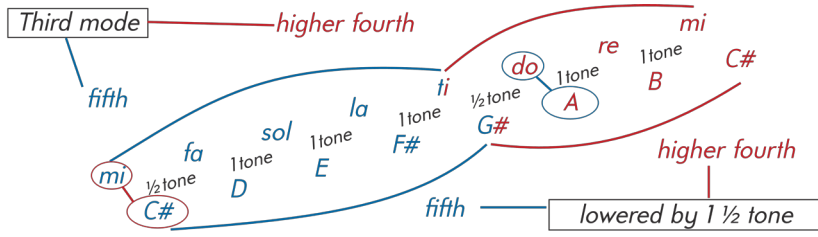
Ant.
3

A- gna ópe - ra Dó- mi- ni, * exqui - sí- ta in omnes

vo- lun- tá- tes e- jus.

*Great are the Lord's works,
sought after by all those who love
them.*

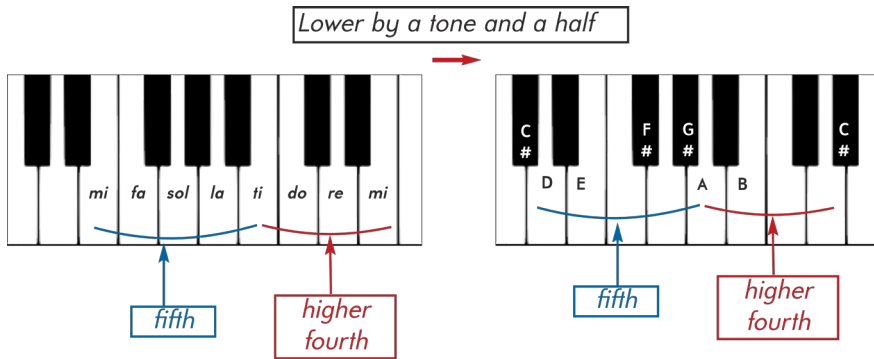
Its final is *mi*; its dominant is *do* (because of the instability of *ti*). Let us suppose we want to sing it with dominant on A. *Do* = C, and A is lower than C by a third consisting of a tone and a half (C–B: semitone, B–A: whole tone).



The final *mi* must also be lowered by a third consisting of a tone and a half. The transposed final will thus be C# (E-D: whole tone, D-C#: semitone)

The number of sharps (F#, C#, G#) is the same as in the key of A Major (C Major lowered by a tone and a half gives A Major), except that the “tonic” or final note here is C#.

On a piano keyboard, we get the following:



The intonation of the above antiphon becomes:

E A A G# F# E F# G# F# E E

The transposed antiphon can be read with a superimposed F clef on the third line:

Ant.
3

A- gna ó-pe- ra Dó-mi- ni,

TRANSPOSITION
IN TRITUS
—FINAL *FA*

Here is a melody in the sixth mode: the antiphon *Ecce lignum crucis*, the antiphon for the adoration of the Cross on Good Friday. This antiphon is sung three times by the celebrant, each time one tone higher.

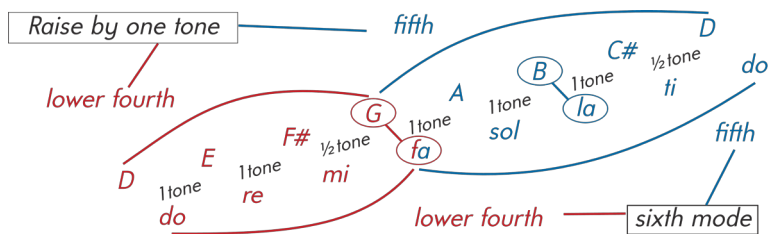
Ant.
6

E C - ce li- gnum Cru- cis, in quo sa- lus mun- di
pe- pën- dit. Ve- ní- te ad- o- ré- mus.

Behold the wood of the Cross, on which hung the salvation of the world. Come, let us adore.

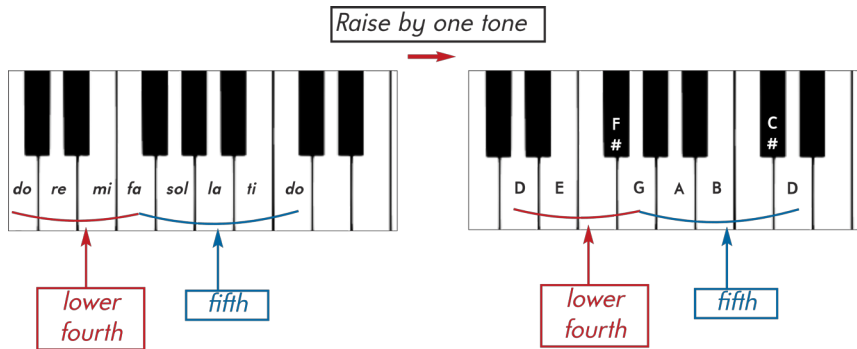
Its final is *fa*; its dominant is *la*. Let us suppose we choose to sing it with dominant on B. Then we have to raise it by a second of one whole tone (*la* = A, A–B: one whole tone).

The final *fa* must also be raised by a second consisting of one whole tone. The transposed final will thus be G (F–G: whole tone).



This scale uses the same number of sharps (two: F#, C#) as the key of D Major, except that the “tonic” or final note here is G instead of D.

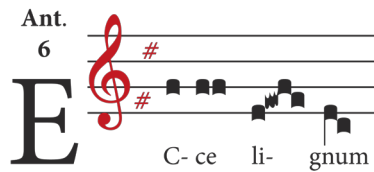
On a piano keyboard, we get the following:



The intonation of the above antiphon becomes:

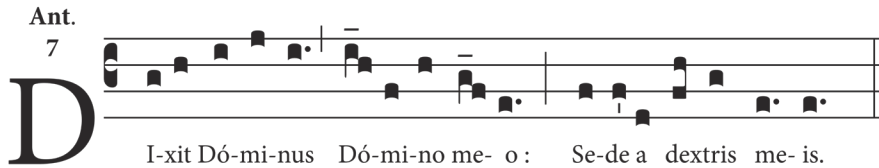
G G G E F# G F# E D

The transposed antiphon can be read with a superimposed modern G (treble) clef:



Here finally is a melody in seventh mode, the antiphon *Dixit Dominus*, the first antiphon of Sunday Vespers.

TRANSPPOSITION
IN TETRARDUS
—FINAL SOL

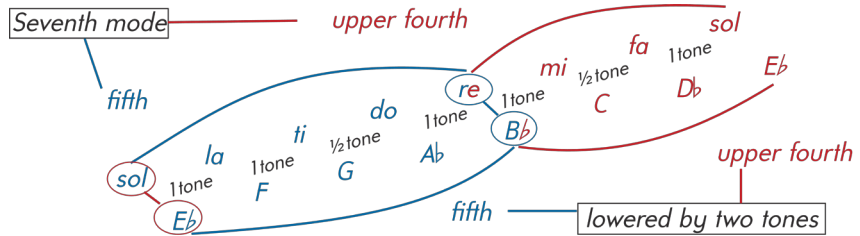


The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand.

Its final is *sol*; its dominant is *re*. Let us suppose we choose to sing it on the dominant B♭. Hence we have to lower it by a third consisting of two whole tones (D–C: whole tone, C–B♭: whole tone).

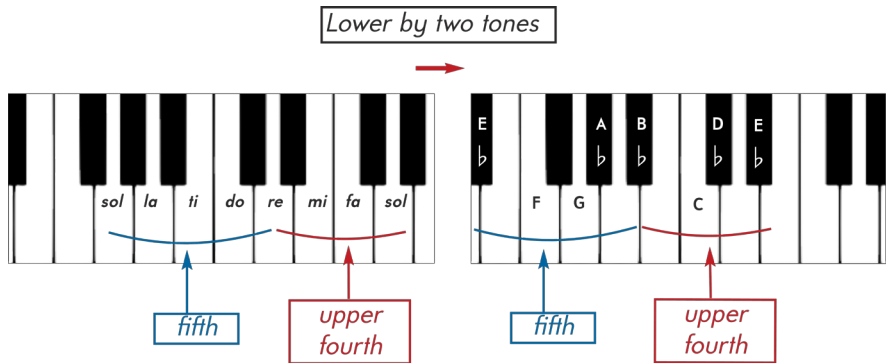
The final *sol* must also be lowered by a third consisting of two whole tones. The transposed final will thus be $E\flat$ (G–F: whole tone, F– $E\flat$: whole tone).

Remark. Let us recall that the flat lowers the natural notes by a semitone.



This scale uses the same number of flats (four: $B\flat$, $E\flat$, $A\flat$, $D\flat$) as the key of $A\flat$ Major, except that the “tonic” or final note here is $E\flat$ instead of $A\flat$.

We get the following on a piano keyboard:



The intonation of the above antiphon becomes:

G $A\flat$ $B\flat$ C $B\flat$

The transposed antiphon can be read with a superimposed F clef on the second line.

Ant.
7

I-xit Dó-mi-nus

TRANSPPOSITION OF
A PIECE ALREADY
TRANSPPOSED

Not rarely do we encounter Gregorian pieces whose final is a note other than the four ordinary finals of *re*, *mi*, *fa*, and *sol*. For example, there are a good number of antiphons in the fourth mode which end on *la* and not on *mi*. These are indeed fourth-mode pieces because their characteristic third is composed of the same intervals—but written a fourth higher (the third *mi-fa-sol*, semitone, whole tone, has become *la-teh-do*).

The procedure of transposition will be exactly the same as previously, beginning with the determination of the dominant of the transposed piece.

Let us take, for example, the antiphon *Apud Dominum*, the fourth antiphon of Christmas Vespers (Roman tone).

Ant.
4 A*

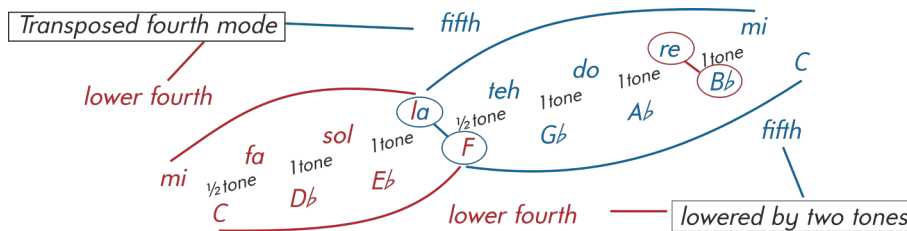
-pud Dó-mi-num * mi-se-ri-cór-di-a, et co-pi-ó-sa a-

With the Lord there is mercy, and with him abundant salvation.

pud e-um red-émpti-o.

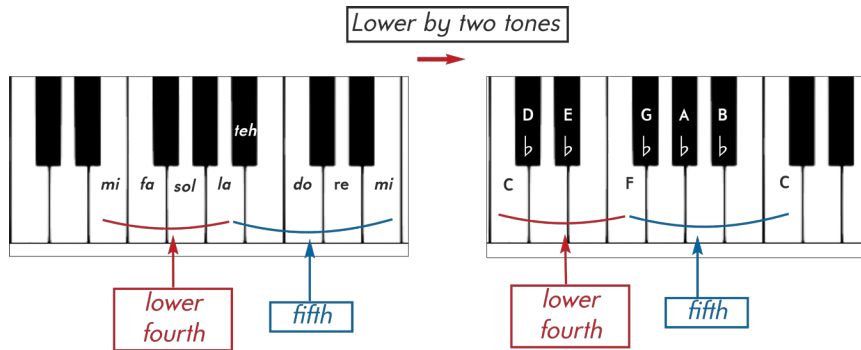
Its final is *la* (instead of *mi*); its dominant is *re* (instead of *la*). Let us suppose we choose to sing with a B \flat dominant. So we have to lower it by a third of two whole tones (D–C: whole tone, C–B \flat : whole tone).

The final *la* must also be lowered by a third consisting of two whole tones. The transposed final will thus be F (A–G: whole tone, G–F: whole tone).



The number of flats in the scale above is once more four: B \flat , E \flat , A \flat , D \flat . This is the same number of flats as in the key of A \flat Major, except that here the tonic or final note here is F instead of A \flat . The *teh* in the original melody becomes G \flat .

This gives the following on the keyboard:



The intonation of the above antiphon becomes:

$E\flat$ F $A\flat$ $A\flat$ $B\flat$ $B\flat$

The transposed antiphon can be read with a superimposed F clef on the second line.

Ant.
4 A^*

-pud Dó-mi- num *

In summary, to transpose, all you have to know is the new final note as well as the structure of the fifth and fourth of each mode.

Re mode has the fifth consisting of t, $\frac{1}{2}t$, t, t

the fourth, lower or higher, consisting of t, $\frac{1}{2}t$, t (going up)

Mi mode has the fifth consisting of $\frac{1}{2}t$, t, t, t

the fourth, lower or higher consisting of $\frac{1}{2}t$, t, t (going up)

Fa mode has the fifth consisting of t, t, t, $\frac{1}{2}t$

the fourth, lower or higher, consisting of t, t, $\frac{1}{2}t$ (going up)

